

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PORT LOUIS 0844

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

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SUBJECT: MAURITIUS WEEKLY REVIEW--JULY 28, 1978--SUMMARY

REF: (A) PORT LOUIS 0818 (DTG 210724Z JUL 78)
(B) PORT LOUIS A-62 (JULY 28, 1978)

1. ON JULY 21 A SUPREME COURT JUDGE SENTENCED 14
LEADERS OF THE OPPOSITION PARTY, THE MAURITIAN
MILITANT MOVEMENT (MMM), TO THREE MONTH PRISON TERMS
FOR HAVING VIOLATED THE PUBLIC ORDER ACT LAST MARCH
BY HOLDING AN ILLEGAL DEMONSTRATION IN THE CENTER OF
PORT LOUIS TO PROTEST BUS FARE INCREASES AND THEREBY
OBSTRUCTING TRAFFIC. EIGHT OF THOSE SENTENCED ARE
MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY, ANOTHER IS THE
MAYOR OF PORT LOUIS, AND THREE OTHERS ARE MUNICIPAL
COUNCILLORS. THEY DID NOT APPEAL AND WENT STRAIGHT
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TO JAIL TO START SERVING THEIR TIME. THE MMM
LEADERSHIP HAS ACCUSED THE GOVERNMENT OF TRYING TO
USE THE PUBLIC ORDER ACT TO SUPPRESS THE OPPOSITION
PARTY LEGALLY, AND WEIGHT WAS GIVEN TO THIS CHARGE
WHEN 18 LEADING MMM MEMBERS, INCLUDING SIX OF THOSE
ALREADY IN JAIL, WERE HAULED INTO COURT ON JULY 26
TO ANSWER CHARGES OF SEPARATE VIOLATIONS OF THE ACT

IN FEBRUARY. THE TRIAL WAS PUT OFF UNTIL AUGUST 23. THE MMM IS MOBILIZING SUPPORT ABROAD TO PROTEST THESE JAILINGS, AND AT THE SAME TIME IS PLANNING AN APPEAL TO GET THE SENTENCES REDUCED. COMMENT: A NUMBER OF OBSERVERS, INCLUDING THOSE FRIENDLY TO THE GOVERNMENT, HAVE EXPRESSED THE VIEW THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS MAKING A MISTAKE IN JAILING THESE OPPOSITION FIGURES, EVEN THOUGH THE LEGAL PROCEEDINGS ARE NOT QUESTIONABLE IN ANY WAY. END COMMENT.

2. AT A PRESS CONFERENCE MMM LEADERS BERENGER AND JUGNAUTH CALLED ON THE PRIME MINISTER TO RECONVENE THE PARLIAMENT TO DEAL WITH SOME URGENT PROBLEMS. ONCE AGAIN THEY REJECTED THE IDEA OF AN ALL-PARTY COALITION. IN A LONG PRESS INTERVIEW BERENGER AGAIN TRIED TO ATTENUATE THE PRO-SOVIET IMAGE OF HIS PARTY BY MAKING VARIOUS CRITICISMS OF THE USSR AND BY INSISTING THAT THE MMM'S FOREIGN POLICY WAS ONE OF STRICT NON-ALIGNMENT AND NEUTRALITY BETWEEN THE TWO INTERNATIONAL POWER BLOCS. IN ANSWER TO CRITICISM THAT THE PARTY RESTRICTS ITS FOREIGN CONTACTS TO "PROGRESSIVE" AFRICAN REGIMES, BERENGER SAID HE WOULD BE HAPPY TO VISIT WASHINGTON, PEKING, LONDON OR PARIS IF INVITED OFFICIALLY, THOUGH HE WAS NOT SOLICITING INVITATIONS.

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3. THE TRIPARTITE WAGE INCREASE NEGOTIATIONS FINALLY REACHED AN AGREEMENT ON JULY 22, THUS AVOIDING THE GENERAL STRIKE WHICH HAD BEEN CALLED FOR JULY 24. THE TRADE UNIONS WON WAGE INCREASES RANGING FROM 8 PERCENT TO 2.2 PERCENT, SOMEWHAT LOWER THAN THE TEN PERCENT THEY WERE SEEKING TO COMPENSATE FOR THE TEN PERCENT PRICE INFLATION SINCE LAST YEAR. THEY ALSO WON A PROMISE FROM THE GOVERNMENT OF A FREEZE ON PRICES FOR THE COMING SIX MONTHS, A MEASURE THAT HAS THROWN THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY INTO TURMOIL, AS IT WAS A COMPLETE SURPRISE. THE MMM UNIONS VOTED NOT TO ACCEPT THE WAGE SETTLEMENT BUT WENT ALONG WHEN THEY FOUND THEMSELVES IN THE MINORITY ON THE TRADE UNION SIDE. THE EMPLOYERS FEDERATION REFUSED TO SIGN THE AGREEMENT BUT WILL ADVISE THEIR MEMBERS TO HONOR IT NEVERTHELESS. THEY PREDICT IT WILL CAUSE SOME FACTORIES IN THE FREE ZONE TO CLOSE AND WILL WORSEN UNEMPLOYMENT. THE COST OF THE AGREEMENT TO EMPLOYERS, GOVERNMENT AND PRIVATE, IS ESTIMATED AT 200 MILLION RUPEES. THE EMPLOYERS DID GAIN A TWELVE MONTH MORATORIUM ON FURTHER WAGE INCREASES. AND THE GOVERNMENT ACHIEVED LABOR PEACE, AT LEAST

TEMPORARILY.
KEELEY

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